

PASTOR'S COLUMN

Lent is just around the corner

I love Lent. That may sound odd but it's true. There is so much excess in life that a season of penance helps to bring balance. Lent is good for the soul. In fact, Lent in 1988 is when I experienced a major conversion in my life from secular concerns to more spiritual concerns. That's when I began attending daily mass, being faithful to daily prayer, and serving in church ministries such as Lector, Parish Council and St. Vincent de Paul. As my relationship with the Lord and the Church grew, I began to experience the peace I longed for but which had eluded me. That's why I love Lent.

The Catholic Church suggests three particular disciplines to help us grow spiritually and experience conversion during Lent: prayer/study, penance/fasting, and almsgiving.

Prayer/Study. Prayer is the bedrock of a relationship with Jesus and the Church. This Lent, our parish will have the usual daily Masses Monday through Friday (6:30 am and 8:00 am) and 8:00 am Mass on Saturday. We have an Adoration Chapel available for prayer 24/7, and the rosary is prayed after the 8:00 am Mass daily. We will have Stations of the Cross twice each Friday in Lent – 8:30 am and 6:30 pm, plus a six-week Lenten Bible Study on St. Paul's Letters to the Colossians and Philemon, and a Parish Lenten Mission on "Healing Family Relationships and Hurts" presented by Father Krafft of Notre Dame Seminary. Consider how best to engage prayer/study in Lent.

Fasting/Penance. The Church asks Catholics to fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fasting means eating one main meal and two smaller meals (if needed to maintain strength), but no snacking between meals. We also abstain from meat on Fridays in Lent. Beyond that, we are to engage in some meaningful sacrifice that helps develop spiritual discipline: for example, fasting from a specific food during Lent or from alcohol or from social media. We also receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is offered in our parish daily Monday through Saturday and will be offered several evenings in Lent. Pray about a meaningful Lenten penance.

Almsgiving. Scripture tells us that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Lent calls us to intentional charity. This Lent our Parish will participate in Operation Rice Bowl, an outreach of Catholic Relief Services to the poor. We also have opportunities to give to our St. Vincent de Paul and Helping Hand Ministries. Indeed, there are many opportunities for giving and good works in our midst. Reflect about a way to be charitable this Lent.

In sum, Lent is a special time to get our spiritual house in order. May we each make the most of this transformative season of grace. May you come to love Lent.

God bless,
Fr. Joe